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ABSTRACT

Teachers carry out a variety of responsibilities in comprehensive school health, including health instruction and identification of students who may be experiencing health problems. Teacher education is considered a major factor in the effective implementation of comprehensive school health. A study was conducted, therefore, to investigate preservice teachers' opinions regarding the need for preparation in health education and the desired characteristics of such training. The study also explored whether prospective teachers' ideas about preservice health education were related to the grade level they expected to teach or their prior school experiences. Study participants included 110 California teacher credential candidates who rated the importance of 55 school health topics in preservice teacher training, grouped into 5 general categories: (1) health content; (2) promoting wellness; (3) teaching strategies; (4) identifying and managing student health problems; and (5) healthy school environment. Results indicated that 53 of the 55 topics were judged "important" or "essential" to preservice training. Prospective elementary/middle school teachers rated training in health content knowledge, teaching strategies, and identifying and managing student health problems significantly more important to their preparation than did prospective high school teachers; no significant differences were found between the two groups in the perceived importance of promoting wellness and healthy school environment. Study results indicated that credential candidates believe training in health education at the preservice level can help prepare them to assume more health-related responsibilities such as HIV/AIDS instruction, violence prevention, and conflict resolution. A table provides a list of topics that are included in the five areas of comprehensive health education. (ND)

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Teacher Credential Candidates' Perceptions of the Need for Preservice Training in Comprehensive Health Education.

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Teachers carry out a variety of responsibilities in comprehensive school health, including preventive health instruction and the identification and referral of students who may be experiencing health problems. Teacher preparation is considered a major factor in the effective implementation of comprehensive school health (Butler, 1993). The primary objective of the present study was to investigate preservice teachers' opinions regarding the need for preparation in health education and the desired characteristics of such training. The study also explored whether prospective teachers' ideas about preservice health education were related to the grade level they expected to teach or their prior experience in schools.

Method. One hundred ten California teacher credential candidates enrolled in teacher education courses, including health education completed a paper-pencil survey in which they rated the importance of 55 school health topics in preservice teacher training. (See Table 1.)

Results. Teacher credential candidates rated health education an important part of preservice training. Fifty-three of the 55 health education topics were judged "important" to "essential" to preservice training. Multiple Subjects and Single Subject Credential candidates differed in the value they placed on several of the component areas health education. (See Table 2.) Oneway ANOVA's indicate that prospective elementary/middle school teachers rated training in Health Content Knowledge, Teaching Strategies, and Identifying and Managing Student Health Problems significantly more important to their preparation than prospective high school teachers. There were no significant differences between prospective elementary/middle school teachers and high school teachers in the perceived importance of preparation in Promoting Wellness and Healthy School Environment.

To assess whether candidates' school experience was associated with perceived importance of training in health education, Pearson correlations were calculated between self-reported years working in schools and each of the five composites of comprehensive health education. All correlations were nonsignificant ranging from -.05 to .11. Similarly, oneway ANOVA's between the socioeconomic levels of the schools in which candidates had worked and perceived importance of the five composites. of health education revealed nonsignificant *F* values ranging from .78 to 1.99.

Discussion. The central finding of the study was that teacher credential candidates valued wide-ranging preservice training in health education, including curricular content, teaching strategies, and the identification and referral of students at risk of health problems.

There were differences in the value that elementary/middle and high school teacher candidates gave to three areas of health education. Significant variance in the perceived value of training in health content and pedagogy may reflect prospective high school teachers' expectation that they are unlikely to teach health. By the same token, prospective elementary/middle school teachers may assign greater value to preservice training in health curricular content and teaching strategies because they are more likely to teach all or a variety of subjects, including health.

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In contrast, prospective high school and elementary/middle school teachers equally valued training in the non-curricular specific areas of Promoting Wellness and Healthy School Environment. These areas describe life skills and supportive contexts which foster healthy behavior patterns in youth. Learning ways to teach life skills in connection with their subject area expertise may be more appealing to secondary candidates than training in health curricular content and pedagogy.

It is more difficult to speculate why prospective high school and elementary/middle school teachers differed in perceived importance of training to identify and manage students' health problems. Secondary candidates may believe that health problems are less serious in adolescent populations, that teachers will be less effective in dealing with them, or that these problems are not essential concerns for high school teachers. Secondary teachers' beliefs about helping high school students with health problems is an area needing further study.

Current trends indicate a critical need for health promotion efforts targeting children and youth (Kann, Warren, Harris, Collins, Douglas, Collins, Williams, Ross, & Kolbe, 1995). Teachers have been asked to assume more health-related responsibilities, which recently have included HIV/AIDS, violence prevention, and conflict resolution. The results of the present study suggest credential candidates believe training in health education at the preservice level can help prepare them to fulfill these obligations.

References

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Table 1

Topics Comprising Five Areas of Comprehensive Health Education[1]

Health Content Knowledge
Alcohol, tobacco and drugs
Personal health
Consumer health
Injury prevention and safety
Nutrition
Environmental health
Family living
Individual growth and development
Communicable and chronic illnesses
Fitness
Death education
HIV/AIDS prevention
California Health Framework

Promoting Wellness
Abstinence
Self-esteem
Goal-setting
Healthy body image
Dealing positively with emotions
Conflict resolution
Resiliency
Assertiveness skills
Stress management
Resistance skills
Sexual harassment and date rape

Teaching Strategies
Integrating health topics with other academic areas
Creating an emotionally positive classroom environment
Responding to students' personal questions about themselves
Responding to students' personal questions about the teacher
Values clarification
Facilitating classroom discussion of controversial topics
Health education strategies, such as role playing, decision-making, question box

Identifying and Managing Student Health Probler
Eating disorders
Suicide prevention and intervention
Child abuse identification and reporting
Teachers' possible liability
Depression in youth
Common infectious diseases
Attention Deficit Disorder
Student and family health referrals
Collaborating with health professionals
Students with special health problems
Students in families with alcoholism or substance abuse problems
Universal precautions
CPR certification
First AID training

Healthy School Environment
Peer education programs
Improving parental involvement
Multicultural sensitivity
Violence prevention
Respect for lifestyle diversity
Drug search and seizure laws
Gang prevention strategies
Laws regarding *in loco parentis*
Laws regarding informed consent
Health promotion for teachers

[1]Fifty-five topics were presented in random order without reference to areas of comprehensive health education.

Table 2

Multiple Subjects and Single Subject Credential Candidates' Mean Ratings of the Importance of Health Education in Preservice Teacher Training

Health Education Areas	Multiple Subjects Candidates[a]	Single Subject Candidates[b]	*E*
Health Content Knowledge	2.44	2.23	6.76 **
Promoting Wellness	2.56	2.45	1.77
Teaching Strategies	2.45	2.29	4.31 *
Identifying and Managing Students' Health Problems	2.44	2.22	7.32 **
Healthy School Environment	2.41	2.29	2.50

Note: [a]n = 77. [b]n = 29.

*$p \leq .05$. **$p \leq .01$.